THE OLD INDIAN ORCHARD

A LEGEND

BY

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DEDICATION.

To the reader who has the courage, patience and endurance to pursue this legend to the end, this trembling venture is very gratefully dedicated.

NOTE.

When the first white settlers came to the spot where Terre Haute now stands, they found on a high knoll rising on the left-hand bank of the river, an apple orchard full grown and bearing. When, and by whom planted always remained a mystery. The early settlers knew it simply as the Old Indian Orchard. Every trace of the orchard has long since disappeared; only the following legend explaining its origin, remains. The writer does not claim originality for the bare facts of the legend; he has simply attempted to give the gem a setting. How well he has succeeded the reader must judge.

The Old Indian Orchard.

HERE on the bank of the Wabash, o'erlooking that turbulent stream,
Rises a knoll like a watch-tower, to guard and protect its domain.
Crowned is the crest of the knoll, with grand oaks of a century's growth;
Skirting the banks of the river in all of its windings the woods
Crowd for a view of its waters, reluctant to yield the glad sight.
Stretching away to the east and the north lie the prairies sublime,
Bounded afar in the distance by bulwarks of forest-crowned hills.
Here from the foot of the knoll, like a serpent, the river recoils,

Shows for a time his broad length, then is lost in the forest again;
Farther away his bright scales glance a moment to view, then once more
Darts he aside in the forest and never again reappears.
Softly the breeze from the prairie, makes music on Sylvia's harp;
Murmurs arise from the river and blend with the song of the trees.
Forest and river and prairie, conspire to make this a spot
Fit for the home of the gods that once dwelt on Olympus of old.
Ah could this spot, now so tranquil, have power of the seer of old
To brush back the veil of the future and view scenes as yet all unborn,
Pleasure and sorrow and anguish through vistas of years 'twould behold!
Autumn, returned from her wand'rings has walked forth again thro' the land;

Called forth her army of artists to decorate Summer's design.
Touched here the oak trees with scarlet, the poplars with rarest of gold,
Maples with purple and crimson, and willows with soberest brown.
Out on the prairie the asters have scattered their premature snow;
Goldenrod gives back in flowers the sunshine of long summer days;
Iron-weed robed in his purple is monarch of all the domain.
Over the land and the river hangs dreamily, softly, a haze;
Autumn is burning her incense to the Almighty Spirit above.
Here in the midst of this splendor where never the ravaging hand
Felled yet the patriarch stately, or furrowed the prairie land broad;
Here on the knoll with its panorama of river and plain,

THE OLD INDIAN ORCHARD.

Stands the rude home of the Indians, a village of nature, uncouth.
Wigwams that seem to be kindred, of forest, and river and plain;
Children were all, of one power that spoke into being each form.
Evening has come with its splendor; the sun gladly yields his control,
Flees from the scene of his honor, 'mid pageant of many-hued clouds.
Fainter and paler the splendor till only the dim light reveals,
Scarcely a trace of the gorgeous array that has passed on beyond
Here on the edge of a cloud that, as bystander, venturing too near
Brushed from a garment superb that a royal retainer had worn
Tinsel of amber and gold and of crimson and amethyst rare.
Over the river and forest the garments of darkness are drawn

Closer and closer. As torrents leap down from the hills and ravines
Darkened and stained and at once plunge into the river and there
Mingle and mix till at last all darkened and stained is the tide,
So shadows from their retreats and mingle and mix with the light
Till all becomes sombre and dark; and far out o'er the river the mists,
Spirits of warriors, arise, and all through the dark watches of night
Dance there the dance of the ghosts, chill and spectral, silent and dread.
There in the willows the crows are now gath'ring to rest for the night.
Hark! from the far water's edge comes the harsh rasping croak of the frog,
Answered by cry of the crane from far o'er in the reeds and the marsh.
Darting about through the forest on noiseless and spectral wing,

Pausing a moment to send forth his shivering cry fraught with ill,
Starts forth the owl, the marauder, for deeds only mete for the night.
Out on the prairie is heard now the long plaintive wail of the wolf.
Up at the village the fires glow and shine in the gathering gloom.
Hunters returned from the chase have brought with them the fattest of deer.
Busy o'er kettle and fire the women preparing a feast
Pass and repass in the light like weird witches o'er cauldron of fate.
Flitting about with the women, like fairy 'mid mortals of earth,
One could behold there a figure that seemed not a part of the group.
Blue were her eyes as the violet that peeped from its nook in the woods;
Golden her hair as the sunbeams that played with the clouds of the west.

Weather and sunshine conspiring could not her fair breeding efface;
Fell from her lips the harsh words of the Indian, like singing of brooks;
Lena, the name too, betrayed that no child of the forest was she.

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Straight to the river, the hunters have hastened to cool in its tide.
Tiresome and long has the chase been o'er prairie, through forest and glade;
Fleet was the foot of the deer but yet fleeter the hunter's, and strong;
True was the step of the deer, but yet truer the arrow that sped.
Gathered at length 'round the fire, before the lodge door of their chief
Hunters are telling the tales of the chase of the king of the woods.
Many the scenes here recounted with gestures to magnify words.

THE OLD INDIAN ORCHARD.

Drifting at length from the chase of the deer to a nobler game,
Speaks the old chieftain of battle and ambush and marches and wars
Tells of the scalps he has taken from enemies powerful and brave;
Tells of the feuds between tribes that more deadly with ages have grown,
Tells of the blood that has flown this fierce hatred of years to appease,
Tells of the enemy sleeping, unconscious of danger and death,
Tells of the silent approach, then the spring and the victory won;
Tells the exploits of his braves, till by gathering strength from the past
Seems his aged form once again to be filled with the fires of youth;
Tells till the hatred of foes that in silence has slept through long years,
Bursting to fiercest of flame, now he trembles and sways in his wrath;

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Tells till the warriors around him grasp weapons of battle once more,
Ready at word from their leader to rush forth to vengeance again;
Tells till the young men are fired with thirsting for glory and fame,
Tells—but in the midst of his passion, as noiseless as shadow, a form
Glides through the circle of warriors and silently faces the chief.
Silent, a moment the chieftain, then towered his form in his wrath,
Flashed his dark eyes and his nostrils dilated, quivered with rage.
In the intruder beholds he the Shawnee, most hated of foes.
Rang forth the warcry aloud then, through forest, o'er river and plain,
Startled the crows from their slumber and silenced the frogs in the marsh.
Far o'er the river, the echoes hurled back in defiance the cry.

Silent, expectant and awed now awaited the forest and plain.
Sprang every warrior erect with his weapon drawn ready for strife
Instant an arrow was fixed and was aimed at the heart of the chief,
Only the move of a hand, and their chief's life the penalty dire.
Thus in suspense stood the foes with the hatred of ages in check.
Quick as a phantom the figure of Lena approaches the chief;
One soft hand lays on his arm and the other the hunting knife clasps.
"Listen, my father," she said, "here a stranger asks shelter to-night;
Hungry he asks of your bounty and weary he seeks only rest:
Though the most hated of foeman he stands here before you to-night,
When, such appeal at his wigwam did Delaware ever refuse?"

Slowly the old chief relaxes the tension of anger and rage;
Slowly the hatred of ages is buried beneath that soft hand;
Slowly the hunting-knife gleaming, returns to its lair at his side.
Then to the stranger extended in welcome the hand of the chief;
Welcome to lodge and to fire, to food and to rest for the night.

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ter the meal has been finished, the stranger his message relates.
lls how the pale warriors came with Bouquet the great chief in command:
me from Virginia and Pennsylvania in numbers as great
s leaves of the forest when springtime returning has bid them come forth.
ow the great chieftain had spoken and summoned a council of peace.

Senecas, Delawares came, and the Shawnees though thirsting for war,
Red Hawk their chief had declared the firm faith of his braves to the peace.
Tells how the tribes must return all the captives again to their homes,
Speaks how the treaty was sealed by all smoking the peace pipe around,
Tells of the couriers hastened to carry the news to the tribes;
Tells how he, Nemo, was chosen to carry the word to the homes
Of tribes on the Wabash; and then all the scenes of his journey recounts.
Westward, still westward he hastened, the moss on the trees for his guide,
Rivers were swum where the torrent was roaring and rushing and wild,
Food for the journey provided alone by his unerring bow,
Or berries and clusters of grapes that were plucked as he hastened along,

Only the earth for his couch, while some thick tree his wigwam supplied,
Nights how the panther would scream and the wolf howl on prairie and hill.
Westward, still westward he journeyed, till gaining the brow of the hills
That bordered the prairie he saw then afar toward the close of the day
Smoke from the knoll slowly rising and knew that his journey was o'er.
Then from his neck he unloosened the wampum that bore the command,
Silently stepped to the chieftain and laid in his hand the decree.
Clearly the old chief deciphered the order engraved on the shells.
Well did he know what befell the rash chief who disdained such command.
Bowed then the old warrior's head and he trembled with sorrow and grief,
Eyes, that at pain only smiled, now grew misty and blinded with tears.

Quick with a message of comfort sped Lena and knelt at his side.
"Why art thou grieved father dear; for I am no Indian I know,
Still I'm your child and shall always stay in your wigwam with you."
"Little you know my dear child that the words that you say cannot be."
"Why must I leave thee my father, the only friend I've e'er known?"
"For being alone what thou art child, a paleface, no Delaware thou.
Far to the east where the sun first begins his proud march of the day,
There where the floods of the Susquehanna sing praises aloud,
There is the home of thy kindred, thy brothers and sisters and friends.
Many the moons that have vanished since war parties plundered your home.
Snatched from the flames of your dwelling I bro't you, my child to my lodge.

Weak was your hand, mine was strong, and uncertain your step, mine was sure.
I was then first in the chase, in the battle the bravest of all,
Quick was my hand to the bow and unerring the arrow I sent.
Thus did I guard thee my child from the hand of the enemy brave,
Loved thee, and fed thee and clothed thee, till here now you kneel child, but see,
Trembles my hand, yours is steady, and heavy my foot, yours as light
As fawn's on the prairie at dawning. No more in the chase I delight;
In battle no pleasure I see, in the deeds of the past I rejoice.
When the first light of the dawning, shall frighten the wolf to his den,
Scatter the mists from the river and silence the frogs in the marsh,
Then be prepared for the journey, this stranger must lead thee away;

Back to the land of thy people, far back to thy kindred and friends.
Thus in my age must thou leave me, for this is the great chief's command.
Soon, and the forest and prairie will know me no more, and the spring
Coming again will not find me; but go child, the great chief has willed
Leave the wild home of the Indian by, Wabash and forest and plain
Haste, for the dawn will be coming. My blue eyes, my golden hair, go."
Slowly the old chief arose, then one long parting look at his child,
Turned on his heel and away he silently strode in the dark.

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Long ere the chief of the day had yet frightened the shadows away,
Long ere the timorous doe her retreat in thicket had sought,

Nemo continued his journey and led the fair captive away.
Thus as they passed through the forest, from village to village they went,
Many the captives released at the word of command which he bore.
Then with their hearts and their faces all turned to the land of the dawn,
Jubilant, anxious, yet fearful, did Nemo the guide lead them on.
Long was the journey and weary, and many the trials they met.
What seemed the power attracting to Lena the guide of the band?
Choicest the branches he cut for her couch when the day's march was done,
Choicest the clusters he gathered for her from the vine as they passed,
If in the dead of the midnight the panther would scream, at her side
Nemo was ready to quiet her fears with his presence and word;

Sudden and driving the torrent, his cloak her protection would be,
Swollen and rapid the river, his arm bore her safe to the shore.
What was that mystical power? Ah what is the power impels
The panther to die for her young; and the bird, when her brood are assailed,
Fear of the serpent to lose and to flutter and struggle and die?
What is the power impels the brave hunter to leave his warm lodge,
Wander for days in the chase and to perish from hunger and cold?
What is the power that finds in a pain for another, a joy?
What is the power impelling to sacrifice all the world o'er?
Words need not tell it, for language can never tell thoughts of the heart.
Thus on their journey they wended, and sometimes the touch of a hand,

Sometimes the glance of an eye would reveal to each other that power.

Long was the journey and weary, but now the Ohio was passed;

Over the mountains they clambered, and soon the sore journey was done.

Many the hearts that were gladdened as kindred to kindred were joined.

Back to the home of her childhood was Lena restored from the dead,

Back to his home in the forest went Nemo, his mission complete.

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Moons came and went, and the springtime returned with her minstrels once more;

Called, and the trees of the forest awoke from their slumbering long;

Breathed on the hills and the vales, and her breath into flowers was transformed.

Gentle and kind were her kindred, but restless was Lena, and longed—

Longed for the home on the Wabash, and sighed for the forest and plain ·
Longed for the freedom she knew on the river, on prairie, in glen,
Longed, as the wild bird imprisoned, will long for the forest and skies.
Filled is the village with terror! A savage is seen to approach!
Haughty and fearless his bearing; and comes he for plunder or peace?
Only a glance at the warrior and Lena has flown to his arms.
Comes he for war? No, for plunder, to plunder a home of his bride.
Fervent entreaty and pleading, and e'en stern decrees of the land
Powerless prove ever to stifle affection and bid it to die,
Seems it to thrive and to flourish and strengthen when strongest opposed.
Peaceful and all unsuspecting to slumber the village is lain;

Gone the last light from its casement and Silence resumes her domain.
Hanging low down in the heavens the waning moon sheds her pale rays,
Chilling, uncanny and ghostly and weird and gloomy and dread,
Moon that illumines the hours when Morpheus reigns o'er the land.
Seldom his subjects behold it, but feelings of unexplained dread
Throng the beholder. He wonders why feelings and thoughts should arise
And fill him with vague apprehensions of ills and calamities dire.
Thus as the village lay sleeping two forms in the moonlight appear.
Silent and swift as the shadow the owl casts in winging his flight,
Pass they away to the forest and blend with the shadow it casts.
Are they two uneasy spirits returned from the unknown, and now

Choosing this weird hour to visit the scenes of their carnal career?
No! 'tis the savage and Lena impelled by a power to brave
E'en this dread hour. As they hasten, to Lena come feelings of fear.
Seems every shadow a foeman, each bush a pursuer conceals;
Starts every nerve at the snap of a twig as they hasten along;
Hoot of the owl has a terror she never had known there before,
Skurries the rabbit before them, the arm of her lover she clasps.
Never the poise of the Indian by sounds of the night is disturbed,
Never the shadows are terrors to Nemo a child of the woods,
True to his course he continues and quiets her fears with a word
Thus in their flight do they hasten and miles grow to leagues unawares.

Vain the pursuit of her kindred when morning discloses their flight,
Wearied, despondent, defeated, they homeward return from the search.
Westward, still westward, the lovers continue their flight, till at last,
Crossed is the placid Ohio, and standing alone on its banks,
Only the birds of the forest to witness their plighting of faith,
Pledged each a love to the other that ever through trials would last.
Screamed from his perch o'er the water the eagle to Nemo, "be brave;"
Cooed from her nest in the maple to Lena, the dove, "to be true."
Thus were these children of nature in marriage united as one.
Westward, still westward, they hastened through forest, o'er prairie and hill.
Now as their flight they continued, dim traces of footprints were seen,

Only the bend of a grass-blade or here where a broken twig lay
Told to the keen eyes of Nemo, that hunters had traveled the way.
Suddenly rang through the forest, the warcry, and Nemo beheld
Three of the hated Miamis, the Shawnees most deadly of foes.
Quick and unerring his arrow; the foemen before him were two.
Then, with the rage of a demon, a foeman seized Lena and drew
Her for his shield from the arrow of Nemo; but true was the eye,
Steady the hand of the lover, a moment uncovered the foe,
Twang of the bow and an arrow has shorn from her temple a lock,
Transfixed the heart of her captor; the enemy numbers but one.
Forth sprang the last of the foemen determined the prize shall be won;

Gleamed in the sunlight of evening his hunting knife brandished aloft.
Forward to meet him sprang Nemo, his weapon his hunting knife true.
Ah—had this struggle but happened in lands where the eye of the world
Searches for deeds of devotion and danger, incurred for true love,
Poets had sung of the hero, his name into story had gone.
Only the trees of the forest this battle for love to behold!
There face to face stand the foemen, each knowing that one must succumb.
Strong the Miami through hatred he drew from old feuds of the past;
Strong the Shawnee in the future and plight to protect he had made.
Round and around pass the warriors, a thrust and a feint and a ward,
Quick as the swoop of the eagle, the Shawnee has pinioned his foe;

THE OLD INDIAN ORCHARD.

Firm in his grasp is the knife-hand, the face of his enemy pales.
Poised for an instant his weapon, like hawk ere it drops on its prey;
Drops as the meteor flashes, and hatred falls, conquered by love.
Westward, still westward they journey; the knoll by the river is reached.
Ah what a sad desolation where once stood the village she knew
Gone are the home by the Wabash, her friends and the old chief she loved.
Scarcely a trace left to tell where his wigwam had stood, and the path
Leading the way to the river, by grass and neglect was effaced.
Sad the emotions that came as she thought of the long happy hours
Spent on the knoll and the river with those whom she cherished and loved.
Lonely and sad this home-coming to what in her heart she had planned.

Weary, despondent, and downcast she sat with her head bowed in grief.
Thus did she sit with her sorrow, but Nemo was busy the while;
Busy with bark and with sapling and soon a warm wigwam was made.
Only a word, a caress, and her grief and her sorrow had flown.
Here in his love she could find compensation for all she had lost.
Thus on the banks of the Wabash in midst of the wilderness vast,
Stood the two lovers alone as the day slowly died in the west,
Only their love a foundation for rearing the structure of life.
Forest and river and prairie the needs for the structure must give.
Days flitted by, and the wigwam to dwelling substantial gave place.
Busy with flowers and garden was Lena, as summer drew nigh,

THE OLD INDIAN ORCHARD.

Forest and river and prairie gave Nemo their choicest of food.

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All through the long and sore journey an apple had Lena kept safe,
Brought from the home of her kindred through trials and danger and want.
Here on the knoll by the river she planted its seed, and her hands
Tended and watered and cared for the fragile plants day after day.
Thus did she watch them grow stronger as visions she saw of reward.
Years came and went, and her hands now were guiding another young plant,
Straight as the poplar he grew and the likeness of Nemo possessed.
Oft' in the shade of the orchard they sat through the long summer days,
Learned his first lessons from Lena, of God—the Great Spirit above.

Queer were the lessons she taught him, half lore of the Indian, and half
Things she had learned from her kindred, with secrets of flowers and birds.
Learned from his father, and wisdom of prairie and river and woods,
Where were the haunts of the deer and the tamorous rabbit to snare.
Years chased each other away o'er this home of contentment and love;
Strong grew the child, and the orchard had promised at last a reward.
Gladly they saw it adorned with its garments of blossoms in spring,
Patiently watched through the summer the tender fruit growing the while.
Scarcely an apple was there but the child had its number and name,
Marvelous fruit in his eyes, as he learned from his mother of lands
Far to the east where it flourished in forest as vast as he saw

Hiding the low lands that lay on the river across from their home.
Gone were the long days of summer and autumn had ceased now to smile;
High in the heavens the wild goose, that transient, was hastening south,
Shot like an arrow by Winter and sounding alarm as he sped;
Honked his weird lamentation and told them of storms and of snow
Ah! 'twas arranged on the morrow the fruit of the orchard to pluck;
Long years of toil and of waiting at last should receive their reward.
Soon on his pallet of deer-skin the lad fell asleep, but his dreams
Fled past the darkness of midnight and reveled in morning's bright beams.
Long by the fire sat the lovers and talked of the happy years gone.
Time and again did he ask if regrets ever came to her heart

For leaving her home and her kindred and sharing this wild life with him.
Well did he know what her answer, but yet he would hear it again.
Thus as they sat here together they planned for the future; but hark!
Crash! and the door of their dwelling is forced from its fastenings, and there
Sprang in the hated Miamis their thirsting for vengeance to slake!
Quick as the spring of the panther, and Nemo is facing the foe!
True as the dart of the fish-hawk, his tomahawk flies, and the foe
Dazed by the light for an instant, lies dead on the altar of hate!
Out of the darkness an arrow, dire vengeance directing its flight,
Fastened its death in the bosom of Nemo, but forward he sprang,
Placing himself between Lena and harm, still remembering his troth.

Out of the darkness another, with triumph directing its flight,
Drank deep the life from his bosom, but still to his troth he was true;
Out of the darkness another, the venom of feuds in its flight,
Silenced forever the heart-throbs that spoke only love strong and true.
Forward he sank as another, with pitiless cruelty sped,
Silenced her quakings of terror; the lovers lay dead side by side.
All was the deed of a moment, the enemy fled as he came,
Silently came as the serpent, left death, and as silently sped.

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Morning returned sad and gloomy; chill mists from the river arose;
Fogs settled down o'er the prairie to hide from the world the dread sight.

THE OLD INDIAN ORCHARD.

Out in the orchard, the lad, grown to manhood in one horrid night,
Dug for the lovers one grave; then he buried them there, as in life,
Heart laid to heart, hand in hand, they had journeyed thro' trials and joys.
Then from the branches above them one apple he plucked, and away,
Out o'er the prairie he sped and was lost in the mist and the fog.
Years passed in stately procession; the home is the haunt of the owl.
Many the wand'ring Miami that never returned to his lodge.
After his vengeance was sated, the lad grown to years and renown
Cast in his lot with Tecumseh and perished with him at the Thames.
Years winged their way and the orchard in springtime would scatter its bloom
Over the grave of the lovers and pour there in autumn its fruit.

THE OLD INDIAN ORCHARD.

Flowers that strayed from the garden they tended with joy and with care,
Wandered in search of the missing and laid their small gift on the grave.
Over their heads in the branches the birds sang of love such as theirs.
Still stands the knoll by the Wabash, but near it a village has sprung.
Out on the prairie the farmer has wounded its green with the share;
Many the pride of the forest that fell from its throne at his stroke.
Oft' in the twilight of summer, fond lovers will stray hand in hand,
Up to the Old Indian Orchard, and pause there awhile o'er the grave.
Little they know of its secret, nor dream that the orchard remains
Ever a constant memorial, a monument over true love.